LESSON 5: CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES — CULTURE AND INDIVIDUAL DIVERSITY

culture   discrimination
ethnic   impartial
inclusionary intimacy
minority   stereotype

INTRODUCTION

Captain Kirk, Lieutenant Uhura, Lieutenant Sulu, Ensign Chekhov, Mr. Spock, Worf, Data, and Geordi La Forge. What a cast of characters. The crew members were international, interplanetary, half-human and half-vulcan, and humanoid and blind with a visor for seeing. Yes, "Star Trek" and "Star Trek: The Next Generation" raised some issues about diversity.

Synergy is when you and your team members cooperate together and create better results than they could get working alone. Each individual is unique and you must value that uniqueness, just like Captain Kirk and his crew did. Real synergy is celebrating differences, teamwork, open-mindedness and finding new and better ways of doing things.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981. This order called for the integration of the armed forces and an end to discrimination against soldiers because of race, color, or creed. Although the Army completed its desegregation in the 1950s, the assignment of whites and members of **minority** groups to the same units did not ensure total equality, racial harmony, or

a fully integrated Army. The Army, like society at large, began to address the questions and challenges of the race issue seriously in the 1960s. Today, every Army element is expected to have an active race relations and equal opportunity program. Laws and regulations provide guidelines to ensure the execution of these programs.

Employees of private organizations as well as members of the military come from all walks of life, different geographical areas, and numerous racial and **ethnic** backgrounds. They bring with them their own challenges and prejudices. The leader's challenge is to direct members of these diverse groups in a way that will cause them to work together as a team. It is not an easy task, but is one that can be accomplished through informed, fair, and impartial leadership and educational awareness.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Values and attitudes are very important to the daily functioning of our lives. They help to form the basis of how we see ourselves as individuals, how we see others, and how we interpret the world in general. As a leader, you will often be involved with individuals who have different values and attitudes from your own — you have probably already experienced many of these differences. Some may have been due to religious or cultural backgrounds; others may have stemmed from racial or ethic backgrounds.

In your role as a leader, you will also be a counselor and a helper. In order to communicate well with others, it will be necessary for you to understand the dynamics involved with the value and attitude differences that occur within us, and that can come between us.

- Values affect daily interaction of individuals. A clear understanding of one's own value system will help in understanding others.

There are cultural differences and similarities in assigning levels of importance to values. In a study that evaluated the levels of importance in five cultures, of 29 values, none of them were shared by all five cultures as *primary values* (values that are most important to an individual and worth dying for — such as, one's country, patriotism, freedom, religion, etc.) or *secondary values* (values that are important but not worth dying for — such as money). Other values evaluated by the study were respect for youth, human dignity, hierarchy, authoritarianism, education, and frankness.

- As a society, we are daily involved with attitudes and behavior and we must understand how one affects the other. As you can see in the following illustration, there is a continuous chain relationship between them:

> *My attitudes affect my behavior.*
> *My behavior affects your attitudes.*
> *Your attitudes affect your behavior.*
> *Your behavior affects my attitudes.*

Attitudes can have positive or negative implications. Although they can help people to make sense out of their life experiences, we, as individuals, cannot change them easily. Furthermore, we may not always be aware of the extensive influences that our attitudes have on other people, jobs, things, and situations, or how they can affect a person's learning, personality, prejudices, and productivity.

SELF-IMAGE/SELF-CONCEPT

As a leader, you will constantly be dealing with people. It will make your job a lot easier if you know and have an idea of who you are and how you relate to others. You need to know "how you come off."

The most important single factor affecting people's communication with others is their self-concept — how they see themselves and their situations. While situations may change moment-to-moment or place-to-place, people's beliefs about themselves are always determining factors in their communicative behavior. Everybody has literally thousands of concepts about themselves: who they are, what they stand for, where they live, what they do and do not do, what they value, and what they believe.

Self-concept is the picture we have of ourselves as seen through our own thoughts, development, perceptions, and feelings.

- *Development* is the way we feel about ourselves, which has a direct relationship to our upbringing; it includes values and attitudes.
- *Perception* refers to the interpretation and the amount of "emotional charge" attributed to past events and present situations.
- *Feelings* refer to the positive or negative, good or bad, indifference or intensity, of emotions or interpretation of oneself.

Contrary to what you would like, we cannot buy self-concept/personality attributes from a store. Your personality is a combination of heredity and life experiences. In order to gain a better understanding of self-concept, where it comes from and how it develops, we must look at several main ingredients: heritage and needs fulfillment/emotional development.

◊   *Heritage*. As soon as you came into this world, society classified you in terms of:

Category	Examples
Gender	*Male, female*
Race	*White, Black, etc.*
Nationality	*American, German, etc.*
Religion	*Catholic, Jewish, etc.*
Family status	*Lower, Middle Class, etc.*
Legal status	*Legitimate, illegitimate*
Environment	*From country, ghetto, etc.*
Physical status	*Cute/ugly baby*
Parentage	*Married, single, divorced*

◊   *Needs Fulfillment/Emotional Development.* Your personal, psychological, emotional, and physical needs define your self-concept. As you grow older, you define your own needs (what is important to you). How you feel about yourself has a direct relationship on others around you. Look at the two lists in the next column. If you do not have a positive self-image, how will you project yourself, especially if you are a leader?

Positive Self-Image	*Negative Self-Image*
Love of self/others	Hate self and others
Be excited about reaching out for the adventure of life	Hide from life and its miseries
Experience serenity, joy, hope, and trust	Experience anxiety, despair, distrust, and anger
Develop your intelligence	Be blind to your potential
Decisive, assertive	Indecisive, defensive, aggressive
Enjoy your physical abilities	Deny or exaggerate physical abilities
Create	Destroy
Be tolerant, accepting	Bigoted, prejudiced
Self-actualize	Suicidal/homicidal
Open	Closed
Trusting	Hidden agendas
Assertive	Defensive

Remember, how we view ourselves impacts not only on how we view others, but how they view us. Some of our differences exist because each person places different importance on different needs. We all would like to be better than we are. You can change if you want. The most important thing to consider is that no one else can make you change. You have the right to fight to remove inappropriate or incorrect perceptions, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes and behavior.

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

We live in America — the most democratic (and free) country in the world!

Why, then, is there still prejudice and discrimination in this land of opportunity?

You might ask yourself, "Am I prejudiced?" It has often been said that everyone is prejudiced to a certain degree. We all operate on prejudgments and make discriminating distinctions every day. For example, if we had good luck with one type of car, we can be expected to be prejudiced in favor of that model; when voting, we discriminate between Republican, Democratic, or another party's candidates.

Although these examples are not of the nature that leaders must be concerned about or have to deal with, they do illustrate the frequency in everyday life that people make decisions based on their prejudices or discriminatory practices. Instead, it is the negative forms of prejudice and discrimination

that can have adverse impacts on leadership and unit cohesion.

Prejudice

Prejudice is defined as a feeling — favorable or unfavorable — toward a person, thing, or group that may or may not be based on actual experience(s). It is generally agreed that a racial prejudice is a negative attitude toward a racial or ethnic group that is maintained through **stereotypes**.

In looking at the norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes developed through socialization, you may have said to yourself that each of those concepts may impact positively or negatively on how you view the world around us. Indeed, these concepts are the sources of bias or prejudice that unquestionably can distort how we make "sense" of reality.

If we agree with the idea that norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes do exist within each of us (and that they do influence our ability to perceive, and that influence can also be called prejudice), it would seem then that all humans are capable of being prejudiced.

Another factor that is closely related, if not interwoven, with the norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes is one's culture. A **culture** is the total of the learned behaviors of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation. These learned behaviors include language, nonverbal norms — body language and facial expressions, and color consciousness.

Many people confuse color with culture. We can share aspects of a culture, but not color. Color is genetic; culture is learned. In many cultures, skin color differences take on a measure of importance, status, or value. The color of one's skin in certain cultures may dictate how

that individual is treated within that culture. Color has a tremendous impact on perceptions in the United States because most Americans respond to color by making assumptions and treating people based on skin color.

Not convinced? Here is a question to ask yourself. *Do you behave differently around people who are of a different color?* You may not want to behave differently, but you may recognize that you do from time to time. It largely depends on the environment that you are in. If you are in control, or think you are, your behavior is pretty constant. Once you become the minority, so to speak, you may become suspicious, feel threatened, distrust may set in, and/or your behavior changes.

The following list highlights some of the explanations for prejudice.

- A dominant group avoids the feelings of sympathy for "dominated people" through over-exaggerations of negative qualities. A dominant group is the one in control of the major positions in a society and that sets the standards for the whole society.

- The belief that one's own family and society are unique and correct. We feel that our group is the natural one and we judge others based on this standard. (**Note**: Every human group seems to do this, serving as a positive reinforcement within each society.)

- Prejudice is a natural outgrowth of the "we-they" contrast. Once an opponent is present, prejudice can be expected. Loosely scattered members of a group then come together to face a common opponent.

- The transfer of internal personal problems to external objects. People who have a

distorted need to feel superior to others use scapegoats in this way.

- A particularly negative experience with a member of a racial or ethnic minority in the past might bring up memories that can cloud our judgment in the present. We may also tend to judge the whole society by our own experiences. If we have not been victims of prejudice, we may not see it in others.

- The "earned reputation" approach means that members of society shift the justification for prejudice to a target group — "if only they would mend their ways, prejudice would go away."

Unfortunately, people with negative attitudes generally tend to express themselves with action, and they act out their prejudices in various way. The most common ways are:

- Openly talking about their prejudices with like-minded friends and expressing their dislikes freely.

- Avoiding members of the disliked group, even at the cost of considerable inconvenience.

- Actively making detrimental distinctions about a group, to the extent of excluding all members of that group from certain types of employment, educational opportunities, politics, etc.

- Committing acts of violence, especially when under conditions of heightened emotions.

Now that we have explored prejudice and have cited explanations for its existence, we will turn our attention to discrimination.

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as the actions or practices carried out by members of dominant groups, or their representatives, that have a differential and harmful impact on members of subordinate groups. The actions may be open or hidden, direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional. The actors in these events may be individuals, groups, or organizations.

It is crucial to understand that there is a direct link between discrimination and power. Without power, discrimination is passive and ineffective. With power, discrimination maintains the dominance of one group over another. When we use the term power in this context, we mean the expenditure of energy to get things done. The groups in power are those that can effectively discriminate: They can pass laws, make rules, and decide who belongs in and who remains on the outside.

Causes for discrimination include:

◊ *Group Size*. This may be the simplest explanation for discriminatory behavior among dominant group members. They fear they will be overwhelmed by the sheer

number of the subordinated "masses." Racial groups that continually increase in size have always been the targets for some form of control. On the other hand, the smaller the ethnic minority group, the less threatening it is.

◊ *Social Distance*. The attempt by a dominate group to keep a distance between it and a subordinate group by limiting access and **intimacy**. (*Example: You cannot join this club unless you earn $250,000 a year*.)

◊ *Competition*. It always serves the dominant group's best interests to limit competition with a subordinate group, from competing for scarce economic resources to other forms such as athletic competition.

◊ *Status Consciousness*. Minority groups occupy a generally low status in American society. (*Example: Status conscious whites avoid lower-status people due to their prejudicial perceptions*.)

STEREOTYPING

Stereotyping is related to just about all of the factors discussed above. A stereotype, whether favorable or unfavorable, is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (or rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category.

People naturally seek to understand or make sense of their environment. Since we cannot possibly analyze or respond to all of the information that we receive, we tend to narrow our focus on subsets of that information. We will usually select the subset that we believe to be most important. People then categorize (stereotype) this information to serve a useful function, depending on their group (religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, etc.) affiliation.

- Categorization simplifies our environment. It enables us to generate expectations and guides our behavior toward a person or an object based on those expectations.

- When we categorize a person as a member of a group, we may assume that he or she has a variety of characteristics that we believe members of that category have. We then look at persons as a group based on a variety of factors (such as age, religion, gender, race, etc.) and whether they are part of the in-group (most like me) or the out-group (most different from me). The people that we tend to categorize (stereotype) most are the out-group.

- Stereotypes are fixed, rigid ideas associated with a category. They are not identical with the category, but are overgeneralizations or oversimplifications about a category.

- Since stereotypes can be either favorable or unfavorable, they can lead to love-prejudice or hate-prejudice relationships.

- Stereotypes are the rationalizers that allow us to justify behavior to categorically accept or reject a group and to selectively maintain our perception and thinking about a group.

- There may be examples of behavior by members of a group that support the belief offered in an expressed stereotype of a given group. (*Example: One can find a few people in groups who are dishonest, but those examples do not warrant that all within the group are dishonest*.)

There are also a number of sources that not only develop, but support and sustain stereotypes. In fact, there is very little chance

of anyone not being exposed to at least one of these sources of stereotypes.

⇒ The very socialization process discussed earlier is a powerful source in the development of stereotypes.

⇒ Hearing and/or telling ethnic, racist, or sexist jokes.

⇒ Reading the literature of a culture or society, whether fact or fiction, has a powerful influence on our thinking and behaving processes.

⇒ The coverage of news on radio and television, and movies all carry powerful messages that create and support stereotyping.

⇒ A male-oriented society only serves to create and sustain stereotypes. Even the pronouns we use when we speak sometimes have effects that are profound.

RACIAL TENSION

Racial tension within an organization is often the result of poor leadership; the following items are major reasons for racial tension:

• Insensitive leadership. Leaders must realize the effect that their actions and comments have on subordinates and on their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions.

• Racial prejudice and discrimination.

• Unfair administration of rewards and punishment, promotions, and duties.

• Limited recognition and awareness of minorities.

Up to this point, we have looked at some of the factors that impact on perceptions

and attitudes, and their relation to prejudicial and discriminatory behavior. We saw that when we judge a person's worth based on a perception or an attitude, our effectiveness as a leader is degraded. We will not communicate as well and trust will not be nourished to its fullest potential within an organization. *We can change. We must change.*

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING CHANGE

So, now that you have some awareness about factors and causes that impact negatively on race relations and equal opportunity, what can we do about it? How can we remove or change some of the negative attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, or stereotypes? This section offers some strategies for change that will require lots of work and some risk on your part. Let us see what these strategies look like.

HOW LEADERS CAN CREATE CHANGE

As leaders, we need to be aware of discrimination and prejudices before they can begin to impact on minority groups, and more important, on people's feelings within those groups. Failure to take these strategies for change to heart can severely hamper a unit's mission accomplishment, cohesion, and trust.

♦ Overcome prejudices by learning the facts and applying sound reasoning processes.

♦ Be prepared to detect and evaluate warning signs of possible unrest that may stem from racial issues in units and take immediate action to eliminate the causes.

♦ Know all you can about your subordinates — their values, attitudes, how they came to be the way they are, and what they want to be. This means knowing more about subordinates than just their names.

Do not base this knowledge on unfounded opinions about the race or ethnic origin of a subordinate, but on the facts about each individual.

♦ Promote mutual understanding through effective communication. Realize that there will always be difficulties in the communication process and deal with the filters, barriers, and breakdowns as they occur. Although the difficulties may be complicated, when minorities lose trust in their leaders, the situation is out of control. Make communication effective by fostering an understanding that reduces racial tensions.

♦ Give fair and **impartial** treatment to all.

HOW TO LESSEN PREJUDICE, ADVERSE PERCEPTIONS, AND STEREOTYPING

How to Lessen Prejudices

It has been suggested that if members of society can accomplish the following conditions, we can lessen the causes and effects of prejudice.

◊ Make contacts with people on an equal status and under a spirit of cooperation.
◊ Share goals.
◊ Have people work on common problems.
◊ Create appropriate educational activities.
◊ Sanction contacts by law.

How to Lessen Adverse Perceptions and Stereotypes

◊ Accept differences. Disagreement is okay, but rather than using statements such as "you are wrong" or "that's your opinion," do not deny others their experiences. Be willing to explore other's experiences as you explore your own thoughts, feelings,

and experiences that brought you to your conclusion.

◊ Listen actively. Listen for understanding instead of agreement. Paraphrase back to the speaker the message you received. Listen with the same intensity to everyone.

◊ Provide feedback. Be behavior specific. Let others know what impact they have on you. Learn to separate intent and effect. Avoid using labels.

◊ Share behaviors/feelings. Honestly share with the group where you stand on subjects, and be willing to explore how you got there.

◊ Encourage feedback. Do not defend or rationalize your behavior; accept what others have to say. This is where active listening is imperative. Remember, agreement is not necessary.

◊ Use **inclusionary** language. Use terms such as "*we*" and "*us*;" do not use "*they*," "*he*," or "*she*." Plus, avoid using "*isms*."

◊ Avoid stereotypes. Learn to distinguish between characteristics based on factual evidence and characteristics based on overgeneralizations.

Recognize that thinking in terms of categories is a normal human function, and when you are doing it. Recognize also that people consciously and unconsciously hold stereotypes as a result of their social conditioning. Since people distinguish by recognizing their existence and by gathering factual information about different individuals, learn to look at people as individuals — not groups. Interacting with people who are different than yourself can help you to see people as they really are.

HOW YOU CAN HELP TO CREATE CHANGE FROM A PERSONAL LEVEL

There are three ways that you personally can create change.

The most readily available and mildest tactic for change is *dialogue*. This tactic is particularly effective to change people who are on the fence, who need support for new thought, or who are seriously trying to make sense out of their deepest commitments. It is less effective for those whose minds are strongly made up in an opposite direction. Dialogue has available to it various methods for effectively presenting information — conversation, debates, and panel discussions are all common.

A second tactic designed to be stronger than dialogue is *confrontation*. This involves

using the skills of effective feedback and active listening in a non-threatening way. For example, consider the following response to a statement "you" made to a group of people:

When you made that statement, we perceived it as being racist and it made me feel uncomfortable because we sense a feeling of superiority on your part.

At this point, re-negotiation is in order. Confrontation involves no longer being silent. The silent majority of Americans — those who have never committed themselves either to overt racism or to active involvement in the cause of civil rights — will now have to stand up and be counted.

The third tactic is *education and understanding*. Educate other people. Do not close your ears when you hear bigoted remarks. Racism becomes more respectable when it goes unchallenged. Most people are simply ignorant of the facts.

- The education necessary to change existing perceptions will never work if it consists mainly of the same people lecturing to others. It must involve active participation by all types of people at all levels. Advice from well-informed members of other groups also helps.

- Finally, everyone must work to perform — or at least process information — on three levels at once (if need be).

  1. Understand your own self and how you see the situation around you.

  2. Understand others, because they will not be like you in many cases. Use intercultural communication.

  3. Understand your environment — where it is coming from and the direction it is headed.

CONCLUSION

Although all minorities and other groups are interwoven throughout every fiber of our society, racist, prejudiced, and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors still exist. Unless we have a firm grip on some of the "whys" behind these challenges, we may be prone to repeat them. Society has a choice. It can die clinging to its bigotry or it can breathe freely in an atmosphere free of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. The choice really is one of survival, and everyone of us has a responsibility to ourselves — and to our children — to keep this society alive by changing it.

NOTEBOOK ENTRY

Examples of adverse stereotyping, prejudicial behavior, and discrimination occur daily. Some of these examples are real and they can affect our everyday lives; others are fictitious and they are acted out on television shows or in plays. Your task is to select one example (real or fictitious) and describe it in your journal. As a minimum, indicate the following items:

⇒ What was the nature of the incident (an adverse stereotyping, a prejudicial remark, an act of discrimination, etc.)?
⇒ Was it real or fictitious? If fictitious, indicate the show or play.
⇒ What exactly was the cause of the incident?
⇒ How was the incident handled between the parties involved?
⇒ How did it turn out?
⇒ Were any of the strategies for creating change (especially the three personal strategies) described in the text used to control and/or end the incident?

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